



# *Fraxinus excelsior* Common Ash<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Common Ash is a broad, spreading, deciduous tree, capable of reaching 100 feet or more in height but most often seen growing at a moderate pace at 70 to 80 feet with a 60 to 90-foot spread (Fig. 1). The dark green, multi-divided leaves are 10 to 12 inches long and usually drop off in autumn while still green but some cultivars may turn an attractive yellow first. The inconspicuous springtime flowers are followed by clusters of 1.5-inch-long, winged fruits which turn brown and remain on the trees well after the leaves have fallen. The low-branched, rounded silhouette of naked branches on top of the short trunk and the black, dormant leaf buds help to make common Ash an attractive winter landscape element.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Fraxinus excelsior*

**Pronunciation:** FRACK-sih-nus eck-SELL-see-or

**Common name(s):** Common Ash, European Ash

**Family:** *Oleaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 8A (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; shade tree; no proven urban tolerance

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

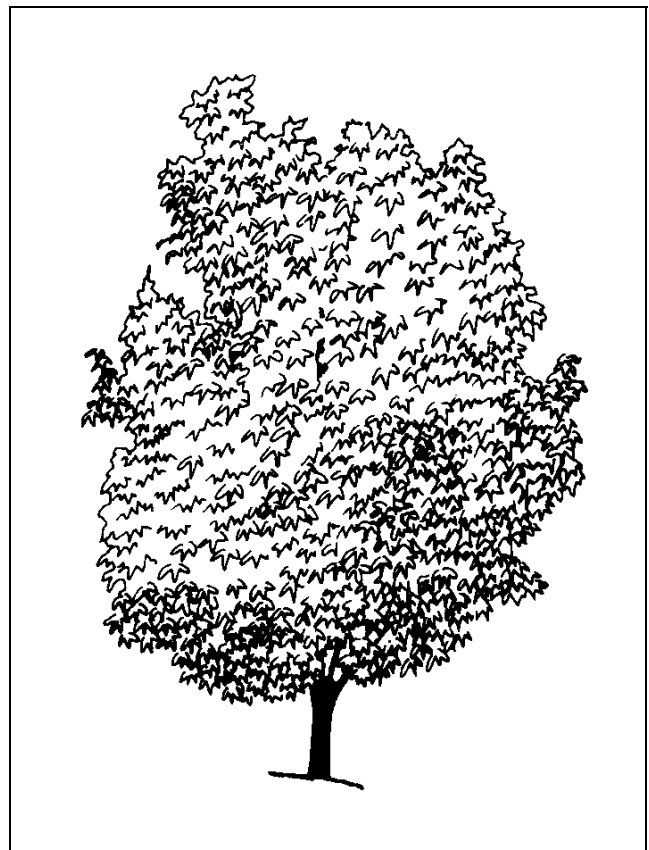


Figure 1. Middle-aged Common Ash.

## DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 60 to 80 feet

**Spread:** 60 to 90 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** round

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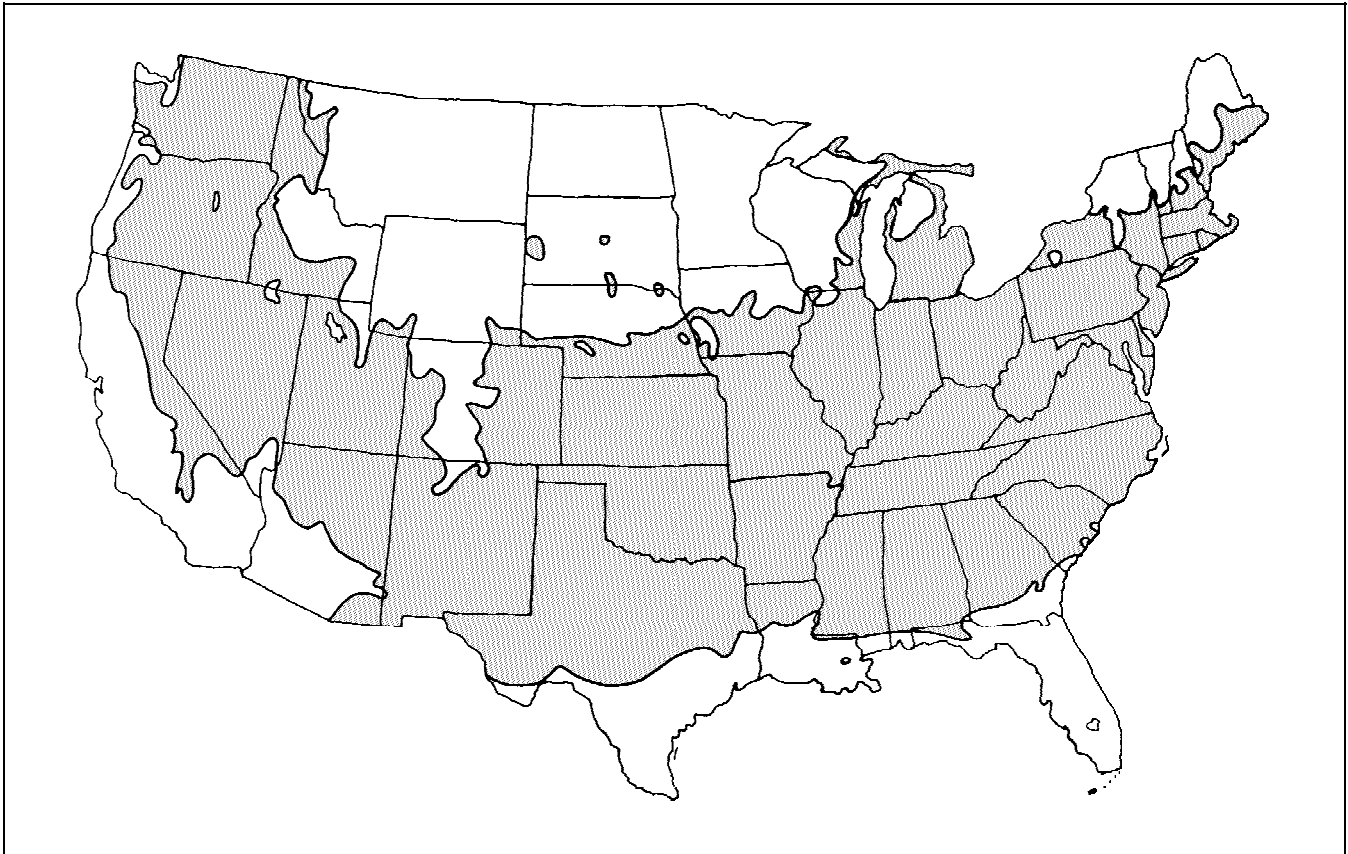


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** medium

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** odd pinnately compound

**Leaflet margin:** serrate

**Leaflet shape:** lanceolate; ovate

**Leaflet venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaflet blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** green

**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** green; tan

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown; gray

**Current year twig thickness:** thick

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained



Figure 3. Foliage of Common Ash.

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerance:** good

#### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Ozone sensitivity:** tolerant

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect tree health or aesthetics

### USE AND MANAGEMENT

Like many Ashes, the tree requires careful training and pruning to develop a central leader with strong branch structure. Without pruning many branches originate at the same position on the trunk which makes them prone to breakage and shortens their life. Select, then develop up to a dozen main branches well-spaced along the trunk as far up the tree as practical.

Common Ash should be grown in full sun or partial shade and prefers moist, rich soil, and grows well on calcareous soil. Grows best on deep soils with adequate moisture, although drought tolerance is moderate. It tolerates poorly-drained, low-quality and

alkaline soil. Its use is probably limited by borers which often infest the trunk and cause the tree to decline. Probably best suited for landscapes with plenty of soil space for root expansion, not in confined urban soil.

The cultivars are probably more available than the species. A few of the many cultivars include: 'Aurea' - slow-growing, perhaps to 50 feet tall and wide, deep yellow fall color, yellow twigs; 'Aurea Pendula', with yellow, pendulous branchlets; 'Aureovariegata', leaves variegated or edged with yellow; 'Hessei', 60 feet tall, single leaves, very disease-resistant, seedless, yellow or little fall color; 'Nana', compact, slow-growing dwarf form with small leaflets; 'Spectabilis', pyramidal shape; 'Pendula', weeping form; and 'Rancho' (also known as 'Kimberly'), 30 feet tall, round canopy, yellow fall foliage.

Propagation of the species is by seed.

### Pests

Borers can kill trees. The most common borers infesting Ash are Ash borer, lilac borer and carpenterworm. Ash borer bores into the trunk at or near the soil line causing tree dieback. Lilac borer causes swellings on the trunk and limbs where the insect enters the tree. The carpenterworm larvae bore into the heartwood but come to the outside of the tree to push out frass and sawdust. Heavily infested trees can be severely weakened. Keep trees as healthy as possible by fertilizing regularly and watering during dry weather, particularly newly transplanted trees or those stressed from some other problem.

Aphids are often seen but are usually not serious.

In late summer, fall webworm could cover branches with webbing. The nests in branches close to the ground can be pruned out when first noticed.

### Diseases

There may be a variety of diseases which infect this Ash. It has not been grown or used extensively.